To: Education, Health & Environmental Affairs Committee

From: Maggie Gottlieb, President, UMD Society of Professional Journalists

Date: March 2, 2016

Re: **Support SB 764 – “New Voices” Act**

My name is Maggie Gottlieb, and I am president of the University of Maryland chapter of the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ), a national organization that promotes ethics in journalism and freedom of the press. **I am writing to you on behalf of our student chapter to urge you and the Maryland Senate to vote in favor of the New Voices Act.**

The bill would restore the First Amendment rights of student journalists - rights that were taken away from them due to the 1988 Supreme Court decision in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier.* This decision allowed public school administrators to impose prior restraint on school-sponsored expression, if the censorship is “reasonably related to legitimate pedagogical concerns.” A later decision, *Hosty v. Carter* (2005) expanded the Hazelwood standard to public colleges and universities.

In 2013, SPJ adopted a resolution condemning the censorship that was created through these Supreme Court decisions. In summary, “...the Society of Professional Journalists stands with the JEA and AEJMC in stating that **no legitimate pedagogical purpose or the public’s right to know is served by censorship of student journalism...**”

The duty of student media is to report on current events of the school community and be the watchdog of the administration, especially given the lack of coverage public schools receive in the professional media. In fact, the student media is often the only source of news that thoroughly covers what is going on inside the school.

Additionally, the schools’ news outlets need to provide student journalists with realistic professional experience as they prepare for their futures in the field. This does not mean simply covering school events and sports games; more so, it requires students find and report upon the important stories, the untold stories and, above all, seek the whole truth. As young journalists, we should never be told to settle for publishing the diluted version of the story.

How can students gain the type of experience necessary for careers in journalism if the matters on which they report are being altered by school administrators, who are interested primarily in preserving the image of the institution? Certainly, some level of censorship is necessary in a public school, and the New Voices Act would allow an appropriate level of oversight; however, the current amount of administrator control is offensive to students’ rights.

While a producer for Northern High School’s weekly news show, our work was subject to the principal’s prior review before it went to air. In my senior year, I pitched a story that involved talking to our school’s handful of Jewish students about the upcoming holiday of Hanukkah. As you know, there’s very little diversity at Northern, and thus most students, including myself, knew very little about Jewish traditions. I felt it was our duty to educate the school’s population about the beliefs of one of the world’s major religions. I wanted to tell this story that was untold in our community.

Our sponsor allowed us to do the story, but became quite upset when he read our script, not because it was inaccurate or poorly written, but because he had to edit it immensely to ensure it was approved by the school’s administration. I remember him saying, “I shouldn’t have let you do this story to begin with! We’re not supposed to talk about religion!” We were discouraged from covering a minority community because the school was worried about how it would look.

In high school, I was never taught how to cover sensitive topics like these because of the censorship that plagues our public school system. Passage of the New Voices Act would ensure that future generations of students be free to cover the important stories that impact their school’s community. It would ensure they are equipped with the critical eye and investigative skills necessary to move on to college journalism classes, internships and jobs. A vote in favor of this bill is a vote in favor of freedom of the press, a key tenet of our nation’s Constitution. Let’s work together to move our educational climate forward. Let’s pass Maryland’s New Voices Act.

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